

# OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

27th September 2011

## External Refurbishment of Housing Stock Short, Sharp Review – Update Report

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor Brandon Clayton, Portfolio Holder for Housing, Local Environment and Health
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Head of Service	Liz Tompkin, Head of Housing, and Guy Revans, Head of Environmental Services
Wards Affected	Greenlands ward
Non-Key Decision	

### 1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

This report contains an update on actions that were requested by the Executive Committee in relation to a number of the recommendations proposed by the External Refurbishment of Housing Stock Short, Sharp Review Group in December 2010. Further implications, particularly with regards to the financial costs involved in delivering the recommended actions are provided to help inform further decision making on this subject.

During a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 14th June Members requested further information in relation to the points identified by the Executive Committee. *Further updates on the work Officers have undertaken in response to this request for additional work are shown in italics throughout the report.*

### 2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is asked to **RECOMMEND** that

- 1) **based on the costs involved, no further action be taken regarding repainting the pebbledash facades of properties located on Ombersley Close and Rushock Close;**
- 2) **if recommendation 1 is agreed then no consultation work is undertaken; and**

to **RESOLVE** that

**the report be noted.**

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### **3. KEY ISSUES**

#### **Background**

- 3.1 The External Refurbishment of Housing Stock Short Sharp Review was completed in December 2010. Two members were appointed to this Group, former Councillor Graham Vickery (Chair) and Councillor William Norton. The Group focused in particular on conditions of Council housing stock in Woodrow, though many of the 12 recommended actions that they proposed were applicable to other parts of the Borough. These recommended actions were designed to improve the appearance of properties in the Council's housing stock and the surrounding environment.
- 3.2 The Executive Committee considered the Group's final report on 12th January 2011. Members of the Committee welcomed the report and largely endorsed both the analysis of the effect of a poor environment on the aspirations of people living in those areas and the measures that were being proposed.
- 3.3 However, concerns were expressed over several of the measures in respect of the possible cost and resource implications. Officers were requested to carry out further work on three of the proposals and to report their findings for the consideration of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in due course. *The Overview and Scrutiny Committee received an initial update report on 14th June at which further actions were requested from officers prior to reporting to the Executive Committee. This report outlines the action that was requested and the outcomes of these further areas of work.*

#### **TASK AND FINISH RECOMMENDATIONS**

##### **Updates and action taken in response to the Task and Finish Group's recommendations**

**Task and Finish recommendation 1: We recommend that the lintels featured on Council properties be decorated to improve the visual appearance of those properties.**

- 3.4 The Executive Committee was advised that Redditch Borough Council did not have a budget for decorating the lintels featured on Council properties. Therefore whilst the Committee recognised the value of the proposed action Members felt that they could not approve the recommendation in January 2011.

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- 3.5 Instead, further work was requested from Officers to enable the Executive Committee to reach an informed decision on the subject at a later date. Specifically, Members requested that Officers gather further information about the costs involved in decorating the lintels on Council buildings and how these costs could be met. Furthermore, Members requested that the ongoing maintenance implications for this proposed action should be identified.
- 3.6 Following the 12th January 2011 Executive Committee meeting a trial of painting the lintels was carried out on a block of 12 garages in Rushock Close. Photographs of before and after the works had been carried out are in Appendix 1.
- 3.7 The cost of repairs to the lintel and the painting of the lintel and the garage doors in Rushock Close and Ombersley Close would be £8,499.00.
- 3.8 A 30 year Capital programme is currently being put together for 2012 onwards which will include all the capital works the Council will be carrying out on its 6,053 stock.

### **This has now been acted on**

- 3.9 *Work to repair and paint the lintels and garage doors at Ombersley Close, Rushock Close and Longdon Close have been completed using the Council's existing painting budget. Therefore Members may feel that no further recommendations on this subject are required.*
- 3.10 *Ward Members Councillor Blake and Councillor Norton met the Housing Capital Manager on site at Rushock Close to look at the work already carried out on the garages and visited the properties to look at the pebbledash. Councillor W King and Councillor Mould (as Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee) were also invited but gave their apologies.*

### **Task and Finish Group Recommendation 4: We recommend that the Council assume responsibility for the maintenance of small strips of land located close to private properties and public spaces.**

- 3.11 The need to maintain the local environment in a tidy and safe manner was recognised during the course of the Executive Committee meeting. However, concerns were expressed about the legal powers available to the Council to assume responsibility for these strips of land as well as the potential impact on Council resources. For these reasons the recommendation was not endorsed in January 2011.

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- 3.12 To address these concerns the Executive Committee proposed that the implications of assuming responsibility for all such strips of land should be reviewed in Woodrow as an initial pilot area. Officers were tasked with considering the legal, financial and other resource implications for the Council as part of this process.
- 3.13 Officers undertook the requested review in spring 2011. During the course of this review Officers noted that the majority of strips of land in the area were already maintained by Redditch Borough Council to an appropriate standard. Some additional minor landscaping work was also identified in the area, including the need to lower some hedgerows and to grind out some tree stumps. A small amount of fly tipping was also observed, though each instance of fly tipping had been addressed by following established Council procedures.
- 3.14 In general however the surrounding landscape is maintained effectively. In recent years work has had a positive impact and has contributed to major improvements to the landscape in the area. *Under these circumstances Members may question whether any further action needs to be taken in relation to the Task and Finish Group's recommendation.*

**Task and Finish Group Recommendation 10: We recommend that consultation be undertaken with Council tenants and owner occupiers to find out whether they would support repainting of the pebbledash properties on Ombersley Close and Rushock Close using lighter colours and, if so, which colours they would prefer to use (it being made clear to owner occupiers that this service would only be made available to them at a cost).**

- 3.13 The Executive Committee recognised the value of the action proposed in the recommendation. However concerns were expressed about the financial costs involved in both delivering the consultation process and in completing the suggested works.
- 3.14 During the course of the meeting the Executive Committee was advised that the tenant consultation process had been set for the following 12 month period. Whilst there were some concerns that consultation could raise expectations amongst tenants that it might not then be possible for the Council to meet Members requested that consideration should be given to extending the consultation programme to encompass a fifteen month timeframe. As part of the consultation process the Executive Committee also requested that the financial costs involved and potential sources of funding should be considered.

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- 3.15 This consultation has been added to Housing Services' consultation planner, (see Appendix 2) to commence in March 2012. However, Housing Services currently only has one part time officer in the Tenant Involvement team due to sickness and a vacant post. All of Housing Services are about to commence a programme of transformation over the next six months and therefore currently do not have the capacity to carry out any consultation.
- 3.16 The total cost of repairing and painting the rough cast on properties in Ombersley Close and Rushock Close is £ 415,608.00. There are a total of 159 properties in Rushock Close and Ombersley Close with rough cast exteriors, 110 are council owned and 49 privately owned. The cost of the work to the council owned properties would be £284,580.00. The cost of the work to the privately owned properties would be £131,028.00. (See 3.18 for financial implications)
- 3.17 *Officers are looking at the possibility that if further Community energy Savings Programme (CESP) funding is released Woodrow may qualify for this funding. The properties in Rushock and Ombersley Close Wimpey No Fines which would qualify them for the external insulation works. This would then negate the need for the repair and painting of the pebble dash on the front of the properties. Under the current funding scheme owner occupier properties have also been included under the funding. Officers will keep members informed of any progress in obtaining this funding.*

### **Financial Implications**

- 3.17.1 The total cost of repairs and painting to the garage lintels is £8,499.00. *This work has now been completed under the painting contract.*

The total cost of works to repair the rough cast to properties in Rushock Close and Ombersley Close is £415,608.00.

- 3.18 The Council is waiting to hear how much debt they will have to take on as part of the review of the Housing Revenue Account changes. Officers have prepared a 30 year capital programme of work, however the amount of work which will be carried out over the next 10 years will depend on the amount of money the Council will have to pay back to finance the debt payment. Current estimates show that the Council's capital programme will be reduced dramatically. There are essential works that will be required to ensure the council's housing stock continues to meet the decent homes standard before external works are considered.

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## Legal Implications

There are no legal implications.

## Service/Operational Implications

There are no service or operational implications.

## Customer / Equalities and Diversity Implications

There are no customer, equalities or diversity implications.

## 4. RISK MANAGEMENT

There is a risk to the authority if we carry out the work and the privately owned properties do not pay the council for the work. There would also be cost incurred if the authority had to recover the costs through the courts.

## 5. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Photographs of work carried out on garage lintels.  
Appendix 2 - Consultation planner

## 6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

There are no background papers.

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